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Crystal Bawls

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from Volume 12, #11 of "Westword - Denver's News & Arts Weekly"

The path to new-age enlightenment leaves no stone--or profit--unturned.

Last month, several hundred people each gave up $300 ($325 at the door) and a weekend to attend "Into the Crystal Dreamtime", an "initiation workshop" presented by best-selling new-age author Lynn Andrews at the Tech Center Hyatt Regency. Some came from as far away as Columbia, Florida, and Canada in their search for meaning.

Beginning with her 1981 book, _Medicine Woman_, Andrews has carved out a hefty portion of the female spirituality field. She regales readers with her sojourns into Canada, Mexico, and Australia to study with native medicine women. While the adventures often have the surreal quality of Carlos Castenada's "Don Juan" books, Andrews insists her adventures truly took place. These include such credibility-stretchers as a ritual evisceration by Aussie sky deity Oruncha, who made meaningful designs on the ground with Andrews' intestines before placing both her innards and several healing crystals back inside her body.

Fortunately for Andrews, most of her initiates were concentrating on larger truths rather than a few petty details. Though she's lectured occasionally, this four-city (Los Angeles, Denver, San Francisco, and New York City) tour is Andrews' first foray into the serious business of teaching revelations to large groups.

She read slightly reworked sections of her fifth and most recent book, _Crystal Woman_, detailing her studies with Australian aboriginal "Clever Women", the shamanic healers in that culture, while participants in the pricy workshop lay in the dark as Andrews directed them to imagine aboriginal sandpaintings, Oruncha and the Goowawa (small fairy-like people).

When Andrews dispensed with the imaginary and re-entered the material world, she ran into trouble. "Throughout the weekend initiates will be placing their experiences inside crystals to have as powerful tools of remembering," the seminar information had announced, instructing participants to bring five of the clear quartz rocks. A basic tenet of new-age thinking is that rocks can store information that's mentally projected into them, just as minute crystal chips store information inside computers.

The stones are also used by some alternative healers to focus energy and move it through the body. Sure enough, "learning how to prepare your body and energy field to work with crystals" was on Andrews' agenda.

But no one would have needed more than the required quintet of crystals if Andrews' exercises hadn't gone through rocks like tissues at an allergy-sufferers convention. In one designed to rid participants of negative thoughts, they were urged to concentrate on their unwanted psychic debris, "picturing it as dirty, murky, brown sludge," and then breathe the image of this glop into the crystal, which would shoot it into the earth to be neutralized.

Everyone breathed. "After doing this," Andrews continued, "you should always cleanse the crystal by soaking it for at least four days in salt water."

Scratch one crystal.

Another exercise called for people to scrub down their partner's bad vibes with a rock.

Soon participants were in dire need of a fresh supply of crystals. Coincidentally, early in the initiation a spokeswoman had told everyone about the handy "gift shop" next door, where they could purchase not only crystals, but shamanistic drums, rattles, tapes, and jewelry. She warned them to stay away from another crystal concession off the hotel lobby. The shop wasn't authorized, she said, and its stones weren't, either. "This isn't connected with us, they're here over our objections, *very much* over our objections," she told the initiates.

The four vendors that travel with us have Lynn's approval," says Paul Andrews (no relation), whose Whole Life Promotions organized the tour. "We know what they're selling and these are products connected with the seminar...If other people suddenly show up later, they can misrepresent themselves as being officially connected to Lynn, as if she's vouching for their products."

So it must have been to protect the purity of the initiation that Paul Andrews went downstairs and started shouting at Sylvia Osgood, longtime Denver teacher, healer, and crystal dealer, who'd rented a small hotel conference room from which to peddle her pebbles. "I'm still so upset just thinking about it I'm almost shaking again," Osgood says. "They were very threatening."

"He (Andrews) kept saying, "I want you out of here," and he was really yelling," she remembers. Osgood says she told Andrews she'd written Whole Life weeks before to arrange her shop, but had never received a reply.

Next came Delia, the woman in charge of the seminar's official vendors. Though she kept the volume lower than Paul Andrews had, her message was the same. "She said, 'We really have a problem here,'" Osgood recalls. "I offered to move upstairs and pay them a commission as soon as I'd cleared enough to cover the rent on this room, but they absolutely refused to even discuss that." Instead, "when I wouldn't leave, they went to the hotel management and tried to get me thrown out."

The hotel stuck up for Osgood. "If, say, an oil company does a convention here, they may ask that no competitors run opposing events at the same time. They have to let us know their wishes on that well in advance," says the Hyatt's Sara Smith. "Then, if we have to turn down business by honoring their request, the original company is contracted to pay us the rental on the space the other group wanted to take. Whole Life never mentioned that they didn't want other groups in here, so we rented space to Osgood. Of course we didn't ask her to leave. She had a legal right to be here."

Osgood says the animosity surprised her, particularly since she's received better vibrations at other new-age events. "I went in with a few local vendors to rent space last year when Shirley MacLaine was here. She doesn't travel with a big group of people and she was happy to have us here at the site," she says.

"Nancy, Nancy, Nancy, why on earth are you dwelling on this negative aspect?" sighs Paul Andrews when told of Osgood's complaint. "I don't want to give it that kind of energy or focus any more of MY time on this kind of negativity." (Translation from new age buzz-speak: Nancy, I don't like that question.)

He continues: "We have no letter from that woman in our files and what she says or doesn't say at this point doesn't really matter...We made it clear to her that we didn't want her there. I felt it was just so incredibly rude of her to set up her stuff."

Particularly when it was cutting into Andrews' business. Official salespeople as dense as the official products they were hawking frequently quoted prices three to ten times what the same stone might cost in area metaphysical/new age shops.

A few days before, I'd seen a little girl purchase a hefty chunk of calcite for $2.50 at one of those shops. At Andrews' concessions, calcite a fraction of that size was going for $21.

You weren't paying for service, either. "What's citrine used for?" I asked one salesman, a big, curly-headed guy with a turquoise ring as big as my VW.

"I can't really remember all its attributes," he said. Actually, he couldn't remember any of them. "I usually look 'em up in my book."

"Got a book handy?" I queried.

He didn't. "Really, any of these stones--or any stones--will have different properties depending on the person using it. That's all very flexible and spontaneous and any rock you use will change as you work with it. Any rock can stand for anything, you know."

Just as any part of a new-age seminar, however mundane, can have a hidden meaning. "Everything that happens was meant to happen," said Lynn Andrews several times during the initiation. "We are responsible for *everything* that happens to us."

And let the chips fall where they may.

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Last modified: August 19 2018 14:56:49